— Courtesy The Daily Star

Bangladesh must confront unseen hunger

Government needs to escalate efforts to lift 1.6 crore people from acute food insecurity

Editorial — The Daily Star (Bangladesh)

A NEW report on food security in Bangladesh offers a lesson that managing a crisis is not the same as solving it. While the number of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity has dropped from 2.35 crore in 2024 to 1.6 crore this year, the figure is still an indictment of a system that continues to fail the most vulnerable. Among them are 3.61 lakh people who are in "emergency" conditions, a technical term that belies the brutal reality of empty stomachs and fading hope. This is a crisis unfolding in slow motion.

The report, prepared by the Bangladesh government in concert with United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners, is commendable for its clarity and rigour and leaves little room for ambiguity. The epicentre of this food insecurity crisis is Cox's Bazar, where the confluence of two vulnerable populations — Rohingya refugees and their host communities — creates a perfect storm of need.

The drivers of food insecurity are depressingly familiar. Climate shocks, such as the widespread flooding in 2024, have devastated agrarian livelihoods, washing away crops as well as the means of recovery. Economic shocks, in the form of persistent inflation and market volatility, have also eroded the purchasing power of the marginalised. Perhaps most damning of all is the man-made crisis of neglect. As needs intensify, the international community is reducing the humanitarian funding that is a literal lifeline for hundreds of thousands. This is a failure of the international community's resolve. The world rallied with promises when the Rohingya fled genocide; it is now quietly reneging on those promises, leaving Bangladesh to shoulder a burden that is rightfully the world's.

Compounding the food crisis is a parallel nutrition emergency that threatens a generation. The projection that 16 lakh children under five will suffer from acute malnutrition this year should set off alarm bells. Malnutrition in early childhood causes irreversible physical and cognitive damage, crippling a nation's future potential and locking children into a cycle of poverty before their lives have truly begun.

The Bangladesh government has rightly acknowledged the "sobering picture" and committed to action. But the government cannot do it alone. The report's key recommendations — life-saving assistance, shock-responsive safety nets, agricultural support — are a clear roadmap. The government's political will must be met with a sustained financial and technical commitment from the international community.

Bangladesh's progress in food security, however hard-won, is fragile. The reduction in food insecurity from 2024 shows what coordinated effort can achieve. But allowing donor fatigue or global indifference to undermine this momentum would be a moral and strategic failure. Millions of people facing severe hunger are the final test of our conscience. They reflect a grim reality that can no longer be ignored.—ANN

Why multilateralism matters for the Asia-Pacific region

Concerns about rising protectionism, driven by nationalism and a backlash against globalisation, are back

By Jayant Menon

—Courtesy China Daily

LEADERS from around the region and beyond have been coming together for meetings associated with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. When leaders of APEC economies gather in Gyeongju, the Republic of Korea, from Oct 31 to Nov 1 for the 2025 APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, they may well reflect on how many of the concerns from APEC's first ministerial meeting in 1989 have reemerged today.

Back then, when ministers from 12 Asia-Pacific economies attended the first conference in Canberra, there were similar concerns about rising protectionism and the potential for a trade war erupting between the world's then two largest economic powers, the United States and Japan.

Today, the same concerns about rising protectionism, driven by nationalism and a backlash against globalisation, are back. Some issues have become more pressing, such as dealing with climate change and ensuring more sustainable growth, while new issues such as the challenges posed by the rapid development of artificial intelligence have emerged, all of which are on the agenda of the Asean and APEC meetings.

The undermining of global institutions such as the WTO and the erosion of a rules-based world trading system present new challenges, as well as opportunities, for groupings such as Asean and APEC. In its original conception, APEC had advocated non-discrimination and had become the benchmark for regional groupings seeking to pursue "open regionalism". That is, to use regionalism as a building rather than a stumbling block, toward free and open trade that promotes globalism. This is exactly what the original Asean members have been doing by voluntarily multilateralising, or offering preferential tariffs to non-members on a most favored nation basis. It could be argued that institutions like APEC have an even more important role to play now, in ensuring the world trading system remains free and open.

In purely practical terms, the APEC meeting marked the first face-to-face meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump since the latter began his second term in the White House. It also brings into relief the fact that APEC is the only regional economic cooperation initiative that includes both the US and China.

Indeed, the meeting could not have come at a more opportune time, with negotiations between the two countries still ongoing, punctuated by periodic flare-ups in tensions that threaten to boil over. This uncertainty resulting from the trade brawl needs to end, and hopefully this meeting will help create the right incentive for a fair and rational deal to be struck.

Apart from these regional groupings, there is the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership with four members from Asean and seven from the RCEP. China has applied to join it. The CPTPP is considered the "gold standard" as far as the depth and quality of FTAs are concerned. The RCEP is less ambitious but forms the largest FTA in the world, having brought together key members involved in regional manufacturing supply chains. Like APEC, these institutions gain in importance when multilateralism is undermined. These institutions can help lock in the gains that have been made in liberalizing trade, by preventing backtracking. Through their commitment to openness, they might be able to make progress in liberalising select sectors and policy areas despite rising disenchantment with globalisation from certain countries.

If Asean lies at the center of the RCEP, its supply chains remain China-centered. The RCEP has open rules of origin and seeks to harmonise rules and regulations throughout the region. Such regulatory convergence will significantly reduce the cost of doing business in the region. Although the RCEP came into force in 2022, it has been slow to make tangible progress with its accords. It is, however, expected to speed up implementation of its work programme, particularly after the establishment of the RCEP Support Unit in December 2024. The RCEP should rise to the challenge of filling the void created by the backsliding on multilateralism.

China has other initiatives that can support supply chains in Asean and beyond. The Belt and Road Initiative is a key programme designed to increase connectivity within and between regions, at a time when bilateral and multilateral financing is facing challenges. Trade costs are directly related to the level of connectivity, and as these costs come down, integration will rise. Reducing these trade costs is critical to supporting the growth and spread of regional supply chains. China's Global Development Initiative complements this program by supporting smaller-scale investments in the soft sectors. A healthy and skilled workforce is equally important to support regional supply chains and ensure inclusive development.

China has been a major proponent of multilateral free trade. China's role in the green transition globally, as an important player in the "new three" industries of electric vehicles, renewable energy, and battery technologies, is dependent on such a system. As the world's largest trading nation, it has everything to gain from preserving multilateralism.

The US was one of the major architects of this rules-based international trading system. If it continues to seek to overhaul the sywstem, overlook the enormous benefits that it has reaped, the whole world will lose and pay the price. Fortunately the talks between the leaders of the two largest economies have brought a sigh of relief for the time being.—China Daily/ANN

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Unmanned cargo ship must play key role in backing space cooperation

Editorial — The Japan News

THE ability to transport large quantities of experimental equipment and food into space will dramatically expand the scope of activities there. Japan must enhance its presence in the field of transportation, an indispensable element of international space development.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) has launched the first HTV-X, its new unmanned supply vehicle, from the Tanegashima Space Center in Kagoshima Prefecture. The vehicle will deliver daily necessities and experimental equipment to the International Space Station (ISS), where astronauts stay for long periods of time.

Japan has previously transported supplies using the HTV unmanned supply vehicle, nicknamed Kounotori. Between 2009 and 2020, a total of nine HTV vehicles carried out transport missions without major issues, earning the trust of the United States, Europe, Russia and others that jointly operate the ISS.

The successor vehicle HTV-X has enhanced its transport capacity to 6 tons, 50 per cent more than that of the HTV. It can now carry food requiring freezing or refrigeration, as well as research samples. It is hoped that the HTV-X will play a central role in supporting the ISS through stable operations.

Japanese astronaut Kimiya Yui, currently aboard the ISS, operated the station's robotic arm to capture the approaching HTV-X and dock it at the station. It can be said that because a Japanese astronaut directly handled Japan's new spacecraft, the nation demonstrated its technological capabilities.

In the latest mission, the HTV-X transferred a Japanese-made carbon dioxide removal device. Its performance will be tested in space. Removing carbon dioxide and recycling water are essential technologies for sustaining human life.

Japan should strive to establish such technologies in preparation for the coming era of expanded human activities in space.

Previous supply vehicles were discarded by having them reenter the atmosphere once they delivered their cargo. However, the HTV-X will remain in orbit like a satellite for several months after leaving the ISS and conduct various tests. This design, which makes efficient use of the spacecraft, is commendable.

JAXA will conduct a number of tests, including measuring the new supply vehicle's orbital orientation using lasers from the ground. This is significant, as it will likely lead to the development of technologies to accurately assess and remove the large amount of debris floating in space.

It has been decided that the ISS' operations will continue through 2030, and four more cargo transfer missions using the HTV-X are planned. After that, the functions of the ISS will be transferred to a private space station. As the main player of space development will be shifting to the private sector, Japan will likely need to develop its own private-sector supply vehicle.

The US-led Artemis manned lunar exploration program includes plans to build a base in lunar orbit. It is hoped that the new supply vehicle will also play a vital role in transporting supplies for such missions.—ANN

NEWSMAKERS

AMRITSAR (East Punjab): Commuters drive along a road amid smog in the city on Sunday.—AFP

PARTICIPANTS use umbrellas and plastic sheets to shield themselves from heavy rain during a festival in Taunggyi, Myanmar's northeastern Shan State.—AFP

MAIMUNAH (centre) launching the DBKL Calendar of Events 2026 with Ismadi (left) and Rafidah.—Courtesy The Star

KL targets 30 million tourists

KUALA Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) is targeting 30 million inbound tourists to the city during Visit Malaysia 2026.

Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif said DBKL had lined up 35 major events to showcase Malaysia's arts, culture and heritage. "A lot of people visit other states like Sabah, Sarawak and Penang. "If we reach more than half of the targeted 46 million tourists nationwide, it would be great."

She said DBKL had launched next year's event calendar early to allow tourists to preview events that would take place throughout the year.

"This demonstrates DBKL's commitment, alongside the Tourism Ministry, Tourism Malaysia, the private sector and the community, to strengthen Kuala Lumpur as a tourism hub. "This aligns with the 4P concept — public-private-people partnership.

"We are also taking momentum from the recent Asean Summit, where the heads of state from Asean countries and beyond came to Malaysia and gathered in Kuala Lumpur," she said during the press conference for the launch of the DBKL Calendar of Events 2026 at the Mayor's Courtyard, Jalan Tangsi.

Maimunah said a highlight would be the Kuala Lumpur Orchestra Festival, which would be held at Auditorium Bandaraya, from May 30 to June 6. "We see the event drawing participants from various countries.

"We can also expect the inauguration of the Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad's preservation in January, as well as the I Lite U @ Bukit Bintang Initiative to light up the city," she said.

Ambassador of Hungary to Malaysia Dr Sandor Sipos, Tourism Malaysia deputy director-general Datin Rafidah Idris, DBKL executive director (Socio-economic Development) Ismadi Sakirin and executive director (Management) Nor Azlina Mohd Saad were at the launch.—The Star (Malaysia)/ANN

ISTANBUL: Fans display the flag of Palestine before a match between two football teams on Sunday.—Reuters

GYEONGJU: South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung presents gifts, which included 'the finest' wooden board for ancient strategy game Go, to China's President Xi Jinping after their meeting on Saturday, while the Chinese president gifted President Lee a pair of Xiaomi smartphones and jokingly urged him to 'check if there's a backdoor,' during a state visit that capped the APEC forum.—Reuters